

tried last year; our plan was not acceptable; and therefore we are not going to do anything.

That is not a strong leadership position. That is not a position that the administration should take. Nevertheless, the issue has to be dealt with. We propose to deal with it. The budget will suggest that in terms of part A the remedy might be found in the area of reducing growth—not cuts, not draconian cuts but, rather, reducing the growth from 10 percent to 7 percent, 8 percent, and that we can do this by changing some of the processes.

I think that this is the important thing that we have to talk about; that there ought to be some choices for seniors; that we ought to have some opportunities to use managed care; that there ought to be some incentives for people to find better ways of receiving services.

But the idea that we can simply sit back and continue to do what it is—the suggestion was made yesterday, if we can do something with the budget, we simply ought to take more money and put it into the program without changing.

Mr. President, that is not a useful solution. We have to find some ways to make the program work better. It seems to me that that is the great opportunity that we have had in this Congress for the first time in a number of years, to examine programs; not to do away with programs, but to find ways to deliver services more efficiently, to find ways, better ways, to deliver services to people who are eligible for those services. That is the challenge that we have.

Mr. President, I yield to my colleague, the Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. THOMPSON addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the Senator from Tennessee.

FACING UP TO OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

Mr. THOMPSON. I thank my colleague from Wyoming. As usual, he hits the mark squarely. He outlines the problem.

Mr. President, I think what we are about here today is a part of a broader consideration, and that is our responsibility to the American people. We are getting about, I believe, responding to an issue here that is on the minds of the American people and we are doing something that is different, I think, than what has been going on in this body and in this city for a long time. And that is, we are facing up to our responsibilities.

Mr. President, I feel that for a long period of time in this country the U.S. Congress, in being more interested in the next election and the next election cycle than the next generation, for a long time has been putting its problems off and rolling them forward again and again and again hoping that perhaps the next generation or some-

one else will figure out how to dig out from under the present problems that we have laid on them.

This Medicare situation falls into that category. We have to face up to it. I believe it is the responsibility of this body to identify those items, those matters which we have concluded represent a substantial affect on peoples lives in the future. I think the Medicare trustees have put us in that position. They have given us information. We have the bully pulpit. We must inform the American people of what is happening. There is no room for re-criminations right now as to how we got there, why we got there. We need to get about solving this problem.

Put in blunt terms, Mr. President, the trustees have informed us that, if we do not do anything, in 7 years Medicare is going to go broke. I do not know how much more simply we can explain it.

Medicare expenditures are increasing at the rate of 10 percent a year. We cannot sustain 10 percent a year. Now, the budget that has been put forward by the Budget Committee increases Medicare spending. It increases Medicare spending at the rate of 7.1 percent a year; not the 10 percent, but 7.1 percent.

We can get the job done at that rate, Mr. President. We can save the trust fund. Obviously, it has budget implications. But, separate and apart from any budget considerations, the Medicare problem, the Medicare crisis, must be addressed.

The budget that was submitted at 7.1 percent is an increase of Medicare spending of twice the rate of inflation. We can increase Medicare spending at twice the rate of inflation and still, by not going the full 10 percent, we can get out of this problem and save the Medicare Program for the 36 million Americans that depend on it. You would think that when you have a clear problem like that pointed out by a bipartisan commission—everyone in this body knows there is a substantial problem—that you would have both branches of Government, the executive branch and the legislative branch, pulling together. You would think you would have both political parties pulling together; that this is indeed a matter of national interest that we all have to work together to solve.

Unfortunately, Mr. President, it seems that the President of the United States has taken the position that, because we did not pass his health care bill last year, he is going to somehow get back at us by not being a player in this game.

These are tough decisions. These are tough political decisions. Even reducing the rate of growth on any program in America is a tough political decision, one that we are prepared to face up to.

But next year, being an election year, apparently the President has decided to sit on the sidelines and not participate because we did not pass his

broad-sweeping health care program last year.

I think the President misses the point. People knew last year that the problem was not in the private sector. The problem was with the Federal sector; that is, the Medicare-Medicaid sector. In the private sector, costs are actually stabilizing; in many cases costs are actually going down in the private sector.

What the American people said “no” to was a broad-sweeping, perceived-to-be Federal takeover, which included the private sector. They did not say “no” to reforming and saving the Medicare Program that we have in this country. And that is what we are dealing with here today.

So let us decouple that. Let us get away from the past politics and who did what when. Let us give the President the benefit of the doubt. Let us say everything he says from a political standpoint is true; that he tried to save the entire health care system and we would have saved all this money. The facts are otherwise in my opinion, but let us give him the benefit of the doubt.

Let us say, assuming all that is true, assuming all that is true, that is the past. This is the future. The problem is a severe one. We have been told by a bipartisan commission that we are going to go bankrupt in this system within 7 years if we do not do something. We have to pull together to save the Medicare system for the 36 million Americans that depend on it.

How do we do that, Mr. President? I do not know anybody in this body or anybody on this side of the aisle who claims that we have all the answers as to exactly how to do that. The Senator from Wyoming has mentioned several different proposals, possibilities. It has been suggested that a commission be formed to look at ways of saving additional moneys, hopefully keeping the same amount of benefits; not being under the illusion that we can squeeze providers forever and get it from that source, but to have more choice, give elderly people more choice and more opportunity, perhaps, to save moneys that have heretofore been spent on the Federal program by availing themselves of options in the private sector.

There are any number of possibilities there. But we have to work together to solve this problem. We have to put aside partisan politics. We have to put aside past politics. The problem is too great. There are too many people that depend on our solving that problem.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

Mr. WELLSTONE addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair recognizes the Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as if in morning business for 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.